

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA**

CHERYL SAGATAW and
DEANTHONY BARNES, *on behalf of
themselves and a class of
similarly-situated individuals,*

Civil Action No.
0:24-cv-00001-ECT/TNL

Plaintiffs,

vs.

MAYOR JACOB FREY, *in his
individual and official capacity,*

**DECLARATION OF NICOLE
PEREZ IN SUPPORT OF
COMPLAINT AND MOTION
FOR TEMPORARY
RESTRANDING ORDER**

Defendant.

DECLARATION OF NICOLE PEREZ

I, NICOLE PEREZ, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746, declare as follows:

1. My name is NICOLE PEREZ and I am 46 years old.
2. I am an enrolled member of Red Lake Nation.
3. I grew up in South Minneapolis, where I have lived my whole life. Almost my whole family lives here, including my two grandchildren.
4. I became homeless five or six years ago, and was struggling with addiction. At that time, I lived at the Wall of Forgotten Natives, which was an encampment of predominantly Native people located on Little Earth Trail near 23rd St. in Minneapolis.
5. I was able to find housing, and as soon as I found housing I was able to get sober.
6. I relapsed once since then, but for the past three years and counting have achieved stable, hard-won sobriety, and I am now housed. Because of my personal experiences, houseless relatives have always been in my heart.
7. I watched some of the evictions since the Wall of Forgotten Natives was evicted in 2018 and have been trying to support the unhoused community as they deal with the hardships of living outside, dealing with addiction, and fighting for recovery, stability, and housing.
8. Two years ago, I was helping out at the original Camp Nenookaasi, an all-Native women's camp on 25th and Bloomington. That was a great camp. I was only six months in recovery at that point and in treatment. But at that point I knew that I wanted to be a positive role model in the Native community with recovery.
9. That camp was established for about six months until the City of Minneapolis evicted everyone, about two years ago on Thanksgiving. That eviction was harsh. They came in and removed everyone. We tried to keep it peaceful and advocate for people to be able to get their belongings but the cops were resistant to that. Most of it went into dumpsters. Everyone was on the street with nowhere to go and it was during COVID-19.
10. I kept watching relatives come up missing, people overdosing, we were losing a lot of people. I just felt like someone had to speak up, to stop this cycle. To give the relatives a safe place to be. So, first we went back to the Wall of Forgotten Natives, five years after the Mayor had said he would end homelessness, and I helped set up another camp.
11. About a year ago I started my spiritual journey, and I was renamed to "Nenookaasi Ikwe." I saw that as a sign that the first camp changed me. We decided to reopen this Camp, under the same name, after the second Wall of Forgotten Natives was swept.

12. From listening to residents about what they are saying that they need, I learn. What they need is a lot of love and support, especially from people who understand and can relate to them from personal experiences. Addiction is lonely. We need to be around people we can see ourselves in. If you can see yourself in someone, you can understand them and vice versa. Nobody is above anyone else. And with bigger understanding.
13. Everyone that's here helping at Camp Nenookaasi has lived experience and understanding - nobody just wakes up and says "hey I want to go hang out at an encampment." The people who are here helping recognize that we can't do this alone, and know that people deserve better than to struggle, people deserve to be well again
14. Camp Nenookaasi is a Native cultural based encampment. With that, people are able to ground back with their spirituality and culture. Drugs tend to cause people to lose connection with that circle, with their spirituality and culture. I'm trying to reground and connect people with that so that they can find their way again.
15. About 160 people are here right now today, but that number changes a lot. Approximately 76 people, since Camp started four months ago, have moved from here into permanent and stable housing/apartments. Some people have left to move in with family members and come back because it didn't work out, and are still trying.
16. We have ceremony here, we've had people given their spirit names, we smudge, we've bathed people in cedar, provided cedar and swamp tea to people when they're sick, built a teepee for medicines and sacred items, set up tobacco ties around the camp, had spiritual advisors come bless the ground and put out tobacco.
17. For me, camp has been very healing. I came in and said this is a recovery camp at first, but then I realized that it
18. I've had people get into recovery and move on, some people get into recovery and then relapse, it has been a challenge but one that's healing for people to even just see that recovery is within their reach, that they'll be supported when they are ready.
19. I've seen people who have previously said "I'm not ready to get sober" to reconsider and to think that they're actually interested in getting there. They realize that this is history, what we're doing here. We are part of history, we are going to make a change. Residents are saying that this will make a change for our people.
20. The city's actions are another repeat of history, of forcing Native people to move and move and move and trying to wear us down, keep us sick and unhoused and addicted and unable to advocate for ourselves or live in traditional ways.
21. I had a February 14, 2023 confrontation with the Mayor at the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives march. I confronted him about his plans to demolish the Roof

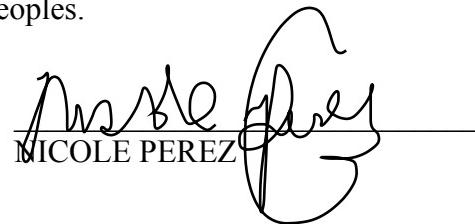
Depot, which is near Little Earth, and expose the Native community to the toxic arsenic plume underneath.

22. The Mayor did not answer me, he could not give me a response as to why Native lives do not matter to him. He had no answer for me as to why he was so adamant to demolish the building.
23. The mayor has been even more fierce since that confrontation. It seems like very much an attack on Native people, like a retaliation against us for fighting against the roof depot demolition.
24. To prevent the destruction of Camp Nenookaasi, we've sent emails, made phone calls, flooded City Council meetings, talked to the media, state representatives, talked to community members, residents, and city council members together. Many city council members have visited camp and listened to the personal stories of the residents.
25. The City Council is coming around to our perspective and recognizing that we are meeting needs for people in ways that the City itself has been unable to do. There are not enough beds, sometimes none at all, in shelters.
26. We had a closed meeting with city council members and a few residents on December 14, where residents could tell their stories. Everybody in local government who we invited showed up except for the mayor. If he really cared, if he really thought that homelessness was such an important issue, he would have come to the meeting last night. He is not taking homelessness seriously.
27. The mayor campaigned for election five years ago on a promise to end homelessness. That was part of his public messaging campaign. And here we are five years later, and we're in a worse off situation.
28. I think the Mayor needs to listen to the people of the city instead of making decisions for them without hearing them. He needs to come up with good solutions, or to listen to the people of the city more who are working together to come up with the solutions that we know we need. He makes decisions without hearing out the people whose lives his decisions impact, those decisions are not working.
29. At this point, community members, nonprofits, residents, and many people within local government are working together and making progress on finding a solution that everyone feels good about. We are all coming together, community, residents, nonprofits, government, putting personal issues aside and making a plan. City council in the meantime has provided port-a-potties and been supportive. The one person who's pushing through the eviction is Mayor Frey.

30. The mayor needs to look at people here as human beings, see them face to face, and then tell them that he's going to evict them and won't help them.
31. This camp is a stabilizing place for people. For many people, this is the most stable they've ever been in their homeless life. They've had a chance to recover from so many evictions, a lot of people here say this is the safest spot they've ever been since becoming homeless. People sleep without worrying. It's become a central hub for resources to come here and find clients and work with them in a continued way to get them into housing.
32. Being told that eviction is coming is draining. Its scary to not know where you're going to go and to be told you have to move and not know where to go or if that next spot will be safe, or when you'll be moved from there. It is traumatizing to not have control over your life, to be portrayed as something you're not - people here are portrayed to be criminals, bad people. But in reality, people here are wonderful. Once people open up and trust you, which can take time, you really get to know them. I know their stories, the reason people are here or are addicted, their recovery journeys, what their next steps towards healing and recovery should be, what they need next.
33. If Camp Nenookaasi is destroyed, people will die. It's genocide. It's cold out. You're gonna take all their resources away, disease will spread, further trauma. I've seen it personally after past evictions, when we left the Wall of Forgotten Natives back in August and came here. People were scared and crying, elders were crying.
34. I am here doing this because I was here before. I had this lived experience, I understand how people feel. I can no longer sit and watch our people go through another eviction with nowhere to go. Our residents have made a family here, and its not okay to break up this family. That's like another pattern of colonization, once again separating families in order to clear land for settlers and development

I declare under penalty of perjury that this declaration is true and correct.

Executed on December 15, 2023, in the City of Minneapolis, County of Hennepin, State of Minnesota, Treaty-Ceded Territory of the Dakota peoples.



Nicole Perez